

Corroon pitching solar power, other energy-saving proposals

By Jeremiah Stettler

The Salt Lake Tribune

Article Last Updated: 10/30/2007 06:23:44 AM MDT

Salt Lake County may turn to star power to brighten its environmental image.

Mayor Peter Corroon will unveil a sweeping proposal today that someday could speckle the rooftops of every county-owned edifice - from tiny branch libraries to the sprawling Salt Palace Convention Center - with solar panels.

If completed, the project would eclipse virtually every other solar initiative in Utah, experts say.

"It would definitely be one of the biggest installations in the state," said Kelly Knutson, a senior policy associate for Utah Clean Energy, a nonprofit group advocating the use of renewable energy. "And it is on the forefront nationwide."

But the mayor's plans aren't sure as sunshine yet.

Corroon's 2008 budget announcement today will include \$100,000 to study the feasibility of tacking solar panels atop recreation centers, libraries and other county buildings.

The panels could plaster the South Towne Expo Center in Sandy, the county jail in South Salt Lake and the multi-building Salt Lake County Government Center in Salt Lake City.

"If you want to know what we are excited about," said the mayor's environmental policy coordinator, Ann Ober, "this is it. We really want to do something big."

The solar study comes as part of broader environmental agenda that includes \$250,000 to introduce more hybrid vehicles into the county's fleet, \$2 million to clean up the Jordan River and \$5 million to outfit government buildings with energy-saving lights, insulation and other behind-the-scenes green infrastructure.

"We have to make sure we are doing what we are asking of others," Ober said. "We are stepping up to our own challenge."

So Salt Lake County will launch recycling programs in every county-owned building, replace traffic signals with lower-powered LED lighting and purchase a mixer for biodiesel fuel.

The county also will sink \$250,000 into its million-tree program. County leaders plan to hire a full-time forester and buy \$85,000 worth of trees to help work toward a million plantings - both public and private - by 2017.

But the solar initiative is the bright spot of this year's environmental budget, according to Ober.

Ambitious? You bet, according to Corroon. But he's confident that the payback - which analysts have not yet determined - will make good sense financially and environmentally.

"It's not only good for our air quality," he said, "but also good for our pocketbooks."

jstettler@sltrib.com

When Salt Lake County Mayor Peter Corroon unveils his 2008 budget today at 1 p.m., it will include these environmental highlights:

- * **Energy-efficient upgrades** to county buildings: \$5 million.
- * **Restoration and cleanup** of the Jordan River: \$2 million.
- * **Installation** of LED traffic signals/study of solar-powered streetlights: \$250,000.
- * **Incentives** for adding hybrid vehicles to the county fleet: \$250,000.
- * **Solar-power** feasibility study: \$100,000.
- * **Hiring** of a full-time forester: \$65,000.